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Achievement in Montana (AIM)  
Student Achievement System

## Frequently Asked Questions for School Leaders

### Introduction

In 2005, the 59th Montana Legislature defined a basic system of free quality public education that included the requirement to assess and track student achievement (20-9-309, MCA). The legislature appropriated funding to the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to develop and implement a statewide student achievement system that provides accurate and timely information about the performance of Montana's K-12 students and schools. The system will support education information and accountability systems at the local and state level.

To meet this mandate, a unique student identifier number will be assigned to every student **who receives any form of education service through a public school district or special education cooperative**. This includes services provided to:

- part-time and full time regularly enrolled students
- home school or private school students
- pre-school students
- students age 19, 20 or 21

### Q. What's the purpose of AIM?

A. AIM (Achievement in Montana) is the new statewide student achievement system that OPI is developing in partnership with Montana school districts. This system is designed to track a wide variety of student information, including: enrollment and demographic information for all students attending Montana public schools, scores on statewide assessments, information for determining a school's Adequate Yearly Progress report required by the No Child Left Behind Act, student graduation and dropout information, education plans for students with disabilities, and participation in federal and state education programs.

The Special Education component is projected to be active in April 2007. It supports special education teachers in completing and maintaining required paperwork, manages special education workflow and timelines, assists with the collection of special education student and staff information, documents decisions made during Child Study Team (CST) meetings, promotes compliance with state and federal regulations through validation checks, and provides documentation used when billing Medicaid.

**Q. Can school districts or parents opt-out of this? What if a parent refuses to give the district information concerning their child?**

A. Record keeping is a necessary part of operating a public school system at both the district and state level. If a district does not report a student in the AIM system, funding will not be allocated to the district for that student. State law prohibits a school district from requiring a student (or parent) to disclose the student's race (20-9-330, MCA). The AIM system will provide a mechanism for a district to indicate that a student or parent refused to disclose the student's race.

**Q. How will the OPI use this data?**

A. The data is used to meet the OPI's state and federal reporting requirements, including enrollment, graduation and dropout counts, federal program participation, and more. Data from this system will be integrated with data from other OPI collections, including Annual Data Collection (ADC), MAEFAIRS, Educator Licensure, School Facilities, and Assessment.

**Q. Will my local district software be compatible?**

A. Most of the data elements the state must collect are already stored in the local school district's information system. OPI will provide whatever formats are needed to upload the data from your existing software. AIM will add value to existing systems being used by school districts, and meet the needs of school districts that lack data-driven decision support systems.

**Q. How will a school district that does not have a student information system access the AIM system?**

A. If a school district does not have student information system software, it can enter and save student information directly into the secure AIM website. The district will be able to query its data on the AIM site and generate reports from the data stored on the site.

**Q. What's in it for us at the local level?**

A. The development of a statewide system that is compatible with local systems will allow districts to focus more on student achievement and less on collecting, entering, and managing student data. The web-based system is designed to assist schools in reporting and analyzing performance data and managing special education records. With accurate information school leaders can measure progress toward goals, plan collaboratively to strengthen the instructional and organizational effectiveness of schools, and make results-driven decisions. When a student changes schools, AIM will assist with the process of transferring a student's record from one district to another in a manner that complies with Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

**Q. What will the state do to present information in a broader context, not just test scores?**

A. The AIM system will enable the OPI and school districts to report growth in student performance data in the context of the challenges and opportunities

facing students, schools, and communities. OPI will use standard formats to report the school/district's performance and will provide analysis tools for evaluating changes in student achievement over time. The goal of the system is to provide timely, accurate and reliable data to inform educators in designing strategies to improve teaching and learning.

**Q. Do you have examples of how data has been used to adjust school strategies?**

A. Districts can use trend data to evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the education program. For instance, school leaders can look at how student behavior and performance is affected by changes in school scheduling, or if reading scores improved as a result of full-time kindergarten. Principals can see how their school's performance compares to other schools. If school scores indicate high reading comprehension but low vocabulary, the school might choose to re-evaluate instructional materials and strategies.

**Q. How will the OPI provide support and training?**

A. OPI will schedule hands-on regional sessions as well as web-based training and video conferencing on data input, security and confidentiality standards.

**Q. How many people in which roles in each district will need to be trained? How long will it take to learn to use the system?**

A. Each district will have at least one person who is authorized to use the system and who should participate in training. School personnel such as principals, clerks, and authorized representatives will have access to the AIM system based upon the role that they have been assigned and the restrictions placed on their assigned role. Length of training will depend on which student information system the local district uses, as well as the role assigned to the user.

**Q. What is the timeline for all of this?**

A. Regular reporting dates are the first Monday in October, Dec. 1, Feb. 1, and during the spring testing window. For the 2006-2007 school year, OPI will use the AIM system in December to collect information for registering students for the statewide student assessment and in March to collect enrollment data for the testing window. The spring enrollment count on February 1, 2007 will be collected in the existing MAEFAIRS system.

**Q. What elements will be collected in December?**

- Legal Entity Number
- State Student ID (automatically generated)
- Local Student ID (if used)
- Last Name
- First Name
- Suffix (Jr. Sr., II, etc.)
- Gender
- Birth Date

- Race/Ethnicity
- Grade
- Part-time or Full-time student
- Program information, including:
  - Special Education
  - Migrant
  - Limited English Proficient
  - Free & Reduced Lunch
  - Gifted & Talented
  - 504

**Q. Who will see these records?**

A. Most submitted information is considered an education record and therefore is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The system suppresses data if there are fewer than ten individuals in any category, thus making it impossible to point to an individual student who might otherwise be identifiable by demographics. No personally identifiable information is available to the public.

**Q. Is this data secure?**

A. The schools are the originators and the owners of the data. OPI acts as the custodian. The State of Montana's solid computer infrastructure ensures the security of the database. Multiple levels of this highly protected system include browser-level encryption and password-protected, role-based authorization to access any component. OPI policy stipulates that data cannot be loaded onto laptops or removable storage drives and taken outside the OPI network.

**Q. What's the cost to districts? Who is paying for it?**

The legislature provided funding for the development of the statewide student achievement system. The state's contract with the vendor includes regional training, videoconferencing, and web-based training for school personnel. For 2006-2007, the OPI intends to provide a combination of software and financial support to school districts in an amount of \$2-\$3 per student. OPI is working on how these resources will be allocated and provided to districts.

**Q. How do I notify and assist teachers and parents who want more information about the student identifiers?**

A. OPI has developed a set of FAQs for teachers and a letter from the State Superintendent for districts send to all parents and students. These resources are posted on the OPI website at <http://www.opi.mt.gov/ITprojects/aim.html>. You also may call Dave Nagel, AIM project manager, at 1-888-231-9393 or email him at [dnagel@mt.gov](mailto:dnagel@mt.gov).